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GNLC/PASCAL Webinar: *The challenge of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and PASCAL International Observatory

On 21 October 2020, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), together with the PASCAL Observatory, hosted the fourth webinar of the series entitled “Learning Cities’ COVID-19 recovery: from research to practice”. This session focused on The challenge of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Opening Remarks and Welcome

An opening remark was given by UIL Programme Specialist **Mr Konstantinos Pagratis**, who introduced the moderator for the session, **Mr. Roberto Guevara**, Associate Professor in International Development School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, MIT, and Director of PASCAL Observatory for Australasia. Mr Guevara emphasised that whilst schooling may have stopped during the time of COVID-19, learning at not. Drawing upon Delors’ four pillars of learning, he pointed out the need for a 5th pillar of ‘learning to live sustainably’. COVID had not stopped us learning, but challenges us to learn differently and this is being exemplified in new forms of intergenerational learning, and communities coming together to learn. The webinar would be drawing upon community and place-based learning linked to the core issue of Education for Sustainable Development, with particular emphasis on links between research and practice.

There followed welcoming remarks from, **Mr Raúl Valdés Cotera**, Team Leader, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, who reinforced a core purpose of the webinar series that of learning from experts and hearing about practical cases. He reminded participants of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 associated SDGs, which presented integrated solutions for global challenges, which should be considered in a holistic fashion. Agenda 2030 challenges us to integrate ESD into all levels and forms of Education. He reported that following the 2019 GNLC conference in Medellin, UIL had set up seven thematic clusters for learning cities, of which one is ESD with some 70 city members. This network shares information, research and practice, and provides mutual support, and has established five key actions. Mr Valdés Cotera encourages cities, including those not currenting in the ESD cluster, to create their own action plans.

Education for Sustainable Development Division, UNESCO

Mr **Alexander Leicht**, Chief of Section of Education for Sustainable Development Division at UNESCO began his presentation by pointing out that starting point for ESD is unsustainable development climate change and biodiversity loss. It is about providing a particular type of learning which build specific knowledge skills values and attitudes. It is also about developing a curriculum that focuses on cognitive social emotional and behavioural skills. And it is more than just something that should happen at an individual level: it is in fact more important to mobilise and political action. Mr Leicht pointed to the importance of skills for citizenship and for full participation in political processes. He reported on UNESCO’s new framework, ESD for 2030, within which cities and city stakeholder voices had been included. This framework spells out the specific contribution of ESD to the SDGs, and the help that ESD provides in making the connections that exist across the SDGs. He articulated five priority actions at the level of educational policies, educational institutions, teachers and educators,

youth and most importantly at local and community level. He then elucidated the actions that had been proposed from this roadmap, which will be launched shortly by UNESCO. Amongst other actions he suggested the need to drive actions at local level and taking a holistic approach involving all stakeholders concerned with education. He stated in his concluding remarks that whilst the city has a special role, the important of engaging all groups in society.

PASCAL Learning Cities Network

Welcome remarks on behalf of the PASCAL Observatory were given by **Ms Michele Schweisfurth**, Professor of Comparative and International Education at the University of Glasgow, and Senior Research Fellow with the Education Research Team at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. She spoke on the theme of COVID-19, Post-COVID-19 and Educational Access, Quality and Inclusion, with introductory remarks concerning the balance between 'building back better' and the issues highlighted by the pandemic of lost learning, public funding cuts, exacerbated inequalities and becoming hostages to information technology companies. She questioned how we mitigate the massive potential for harm. She argued that some needs and interventions are specifically educational, for example remediation and ensuring Teaching At the Right Level (Banerjee *et al.* 2016), with the caveat that these should give attention to the dangers of narrowing the curriculum and labelling learners. Other inventions however require a more holistic and integrated approach. By way of illustration of an integrated approach she introduced the work of the [Centre for Sustainable Healthy Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods](#) funded by the UK Research and Innovation (RCUK) within its Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Ms Schweisfurth made two key observations, and posed two specific questions to participants:

- Sustainable cities depend on a population with resilience and resources that health and learning brings
- Equally, health and well-being, and lifelong learning opportunities, depend on the development of sustainable cities and the communities within them.
- How can education, health and the built environment work together to sustain neighbourhoods of all kinds?
- What kind of governance structures and community agency facilitate this?

City of Beijing

Mr. Dayong Yuan, from the Beijing Foreign Studies University presented on behalf of the City of Beijing, a member of the UNESCO GNLC. He reported that the city has a long history in Education for Sustainable Development, and reminded participants that the concept refers to creating change in our habits and the ways we think and talk about the environment. He argued that in practice ESD requires in students a comprehensive development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and work-related learning. However there were challenges in schools because of overcrowded curriculum that may squeeze out time for ESD because it is considered time-consuming. Furthermore, it can be expensive to put in place new initiatives such as a school garden. More generally, he focused on ESD challenges in Beijing, which include air pollution, Covid-19, Garbage classification, the balance between technological development and the environment, and ways in which lifelong learning and learning cities can respond.

City of Wyndham

Ms. Diane Tabbagh, Community Learning Coordinator at Wyndham City Council, Australia introduced the work of the city which is a member of UNESCO GNLC/ PASCAL LCN. She reported that Learning Community Strategy 2018-2023 of the city, with over 50 community partners delivering on 18 actions,

focuses on four priorities: Celebrating Living and learning in Wyndham; Advocating for equality and quality in service provision; Facilitating partnerships and collaboration across sectors; Innovating learning and fostering new entrepreneurial spirit. There are various elements as to how the city addresses ESD, and the emphasis of her presentation specifically honed in on the Council 's unit of Libraries and Community Learning. General actions included the *Young Scientist of Wyndham Competition*, the *Teachers Environmental Network*, actions facilitated by funding through the state Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) as part of the *Caring for Our Local Environments* initiative that included supporting environmental community groups, and the use of solar power in buildings. Specifically the Libraries and Community Learning unit organises a range of actions including:

- A range of library programs encouraging and promoting sustainability
- A *Green Living Series*, providing activities and environmental focused story time sessions
- A *National Recycling Week* competition for young people
- *Kids club activities*, including a making a Bee-friendly garden and a bird house, a Wildlife friendly garden sheet, guidance on growing succulents, Insect week, and Science week experiments and activities.

More generally the city has run events focusing on recycling for the whole community, and a mini-Environmental Expo with 20 local exhibitors showcasing a wide variety of activities providing inspiration and tips for living a more sustainable life.

Questions and Answers

Questions and answers were facilitated by Mr Guevara. There were a wide range of questions from participants, which were categorised as follows:

- Formal processes around ESD
 - This included issues around the monitoring and evaluation of ESD, the rolling out of UNESCO's ESD roadmap, and recent updates from UNESCO on ESD
- Integration of ESD in the curriculum
 - Here the discussion centred about how ESD can be integrated into the curriculum whilst maintaining the value of specific discipline areas.
- Links between ESD and COVID-19
 - The main issues discussed were what had been learnt during the COVID-19 period with a particular focus on adults, the role of ESD in facilitating transformation during the pandemic and how we might mitigate the 'lost learning' during this time.
- The role of Indigenous Knowledge
 - This discussion focused on how to involve indigenous peoples without damaging their beliefs and cultures, whilst developing advanced levels of leadership in ESD. There was much stress on what can be learnt from indigenous peoples.

After a summary from Mr Guevara, **Mr Michael Osborne**, Professor of Adult and Lifelong Learning. Director of Research, School of Education, University of Glasgow and Director of PASCAL, Europe, made three final points drawn from the discussion. First, he re-iterated Mr Guevara's opening remark about the need for a fifth learning pillar, Education for Sustainability. Second he commended approaches that take a holistic approach that not only cross-disciplines, but only place value on all living things. Finally he noted that not all Learning Cities are yet responding adequately to issues of ESD. He then thanked all of the speakers, and colleagues at UIL and PASCAL who had supported the

event, and announced that the next webinar in the series would be on 18 November 2020 from 1300-1430 CET.

Reference

Banerjee, A; Banerji, R; Berry, J; Duflo, E; Kannan, H; Mukherji, S; Shotland, M and Walton, M (2016) Mainstreaming an Effective Intervention: Evidence from Randomized Evaluations of "Teaching at the Right Level" in India <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22746>

This summary was written by Professor Michael Osborne, PASCAL Director (Europe), University of Glasgow.